

### Flexible working and leave arrangements

When discussing work and leave arrangements, consideration should be given to requests relating to religious beliefs, for example, wishing to observe religious festivals.

Staff could request (at short notice), extended leave to attend a funeral, not necessarily of a relation, but a person who may hold an important position in their community, either here or abroad. Extended leave may also be requested to go on a pilgrimage. Flexitime arrangements can be used to cover the time needed for prayer, for example, for Jewish staff to observe the Sabbath (which starts at sunset on Friday).

### Translation and Interpretation

Be aware of any translation / interpretation requirements and make appropriate arrangements. To respect personal confidentiality, it is not usually appropriate to use family members for this purpose.

Plain English and clear diagrams / illustrations can assist understanding.

### Other sources of useful information

**KNet** Equality and Diversity pages under 'A Great Place to Work' in KCC Staff Zone

Directorate Personnel Officers

Corporate Diversity Team **01622 694659**

Government guidance on the Employment Equalities (Religion & Belief) Regulations 2003 is available from ACAS **[www.acas.gov.uk](http://www.acas.gov.uk)**

Advice for local government employers, including 'Frequently Asked Questions', is available from **[www.lg-employers.gov.uk](http://www.lg-employers.gov.uk)**

The Inter Faith Network for the UK works to build good relations between the communities of all the major faiths in Britain, and runs an information service about faith communities and inter faith issues. **[www.interfaith.org.uk](http://www.interfaith.org.uk)**

**This leaflet is available in alternative formats. Please contact 01622 221163**



**This leaflet gives information and guidance to staff to ensure our services and employment opportunities are accessible to people with different faiths or religious beliefs.**

**Definition** 'Religion' or 'belief' means any religion, religious belief or similar philosophical belief (including agnosticism, atheism and humanism).

## Everyone should feel able to express their beliefs, without fear of discrimination.

In the UK today, people of many different faiths and beliefs live and work side by side.

Providing services in a multi-faith society means that we all need to show goodwill and respect everyone's right of freedom to express their personal beliefs.

This includes:

- Respecting the beliefs of others in relation to their values, religious practices, food, dress and social etiquette.
- Not behaving in ways which cause needless offence.
- Not misrepresenting or disparaging other people's beliefs and practices.

Living and working together and accepting other people's views is not always easy. Our faith and beliefs cause emotions which can affect the way we behave. Yet our differences bring variety to our lives.

A multi-cultural society recognises difference. There are, however, many beliefs which we can all share. For example, all religions have a version of a 'Golden Rule' – treat others as you want to be treated. This is a value that most people would respect, regardless of their religious background.

New legislation came into force in December 2003 which gives people protection from discrimination and harassment at work on the grounds of their religion or belief.

This leaflet helps us have a clearer understanding of how our beliefs impact on the way we live our lives; helping people from diverse faiths and cultures to live and work together and encouraging tolerance and respect through understanding.

Cultural and religious beliefs are often closely tied and we need to avoid making assumptions about a person's religious beliefs and practices. People within a particular religion may interpret their beliefs and put their faith into practice in very different ways. For example, some Muslims might pray 5 times a day, whilst others might pray outside of work hours only.

Kent, like the rest of the UK, has a culturally diverse community. There is a variety of faith/religious groups practising in Kent. The main faiths are Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and Sikhism. 74 languages are spoken within the County.

## How we communicate

Our accent, pronunciation, jargon, slang, humour, tone of voice, intonation – these will all differ across cultures. It is important to consider how communication can be affected by what is said, how it is said and the message intended and received. Be guided by the person you are talking with.

Use of gestures, body language, eye contact, touch, appearance and dress can all give messages. It is important to be aware of how our perceptions and understanding of certain things can be different across cultures. For example, be aware of hand gestures used in conversation. A “thumbs-up” sign may be offensive in some Asian cultures, but a symbol of ‘ok / yes’ in Western cultures.

## Symbolism

Uniform, religious items, jewellery, certain colours, flags, national symbols, etc. can all mean different things to different people. It is important to be aware of this, without making assumptions. Some staff may wish to wear the hijab (head scarf), others may wish to have dreadlocks and full beards; in other cases, what may be thought of as jewellery may, in fact, be religious adornments.

## Differences in Eating Habits

Religious beliefs can affect what and when people eat (including periods of fasting). Even within the same faith people may have different eating habits or rules. It is easy to make generalisations, which may not be correct. Everyone is an individual – always ask.

### We need to be considerate of difference, for example:

- Using chop-sticks or hands to eat, may be preferred to cutlery.
- Observing the right hand / left hand rule of hygiene, where the left hand is used for personal cleaning and therefore not used to eat with.
- When planning meetings or events consider fasting times, trying wherever possible to accommodate break times to coincide with the breaking of fasts (for Muslims the period of fasting lasts from dawn to sunset). Be aware that when fasting, energy levels may vary during the day.
- Take account of different dietary requirements – wherever possible, clearly state what food is vegetarian or kosher / halal, and ensure meat-free items are kept separate from items containing meat.
- Some staff may choose not to participate in Birthday / Christmas / New Year celebrations. Respect that other occasions are important for religious or cultural reasons.
- Try to choose a venue that is comfortable for all participants. A venue where alcohol is served may not be suitable for everyone.
- People may wear cultural or religious dress and this should be accommodated, unless there are clear reasons not to, e.g. health and safety.

### Rules around food

- Muslims do not eat pork and all other meat must be ‘Halal’ (ritually prepared).

- Sikhs generally do not eat beef and may be vegetarian.
- Hindus do not eat beef and may also be vegetarian.
- Rastafarians may be vegetarian.
- Jewish people may only eat food that is ‘kosher’ (permitted) – meat is ritually prepared; meat / dairy products prepared separately. They do not eat pork or shellfish.
- Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims may not drink alcohol.

## Prayer

Some religions have particular requirements for:

- times of prayer.
- space for prayer.
- clothing.

These include:

- preparation for prayer.
- where and how prayers need to be made e.g. Muslims pray facing Mecca.
- There may be religious objects or symbols needed for prayer e.g. holy books, etc.

Prayer needs should be accommodated during the working day.

## Personal Space and Physical Contact

Physical contact, body space and gestures can all hold certain meanings. For example, extending sympathy through touch, embrace or hugging may be subject to misinterpretation. It is important to check things out in order to avoid discomfort or embarrassment.

## What we call ourselves

Names are an important part of our identity - it is important to get names right. It is also important not to change or abbreviate names which we are unfamiliar with or find difficult to pronounce. If unsure always ask.

It is important to check which name is the family name, and in which order names are used, to show respect and understanding of differing cultures.



The following gives you a brief idea.

### Chinese names

- The surname comes first e.g. Tan, Wong, Lee, Ng.
- This is followed by the personal name. In English, this appears as two separate words e.g. Ai Ling, See Lai (female) and Tze Jung, Tong Teck (male).

### Christian names

- Personal name followed by family name.
- Personal names can distinguish between genders.
- Married women may take their husband’s family name. Children may take their father’s family name.

### Hindu names

- All members of the family share one surname. An individual may have one or two personal names.
- Personal names can distinguish between genders.
- **Kumar** (male) and **Kumari** (female) may be added to personal names. Other suffixes may be used in personal names to mean sister ‘ben’ and brother ‘bhai’.

### Muslim names

- A person may be known by several names.
- The personal name may not be the first name used.
- Children do not necessarily have their father’s name.
- Certain titles may be added to names to show respect, e.g. Bibi (Pakistani) or Begum (Bengali) for women.
- Men can have a religious name and a personal name. The religious name should not be used alone, e.g. Mr Yusef Ali should not be referred to as Mr Ali but Mr Yusef Ali.

### Sikh names

- Sikhs have a personal name, a title, ‘**Singh**’ (lion) for men or ‘**Kaur**’ (princess) for women, and a family name.
- Personal names can be common to both sexes, e.g. Inderjit, Gurmeet.
- A family name may be used in addition to or in place of Singh or Kaur, e.g., Baljit Kaur Gill.